

Shepherdson, Melanie

From: kermish.laurie@epa.gov by E&E Publishing <email_this@eenews.net>
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OIL AND GAS: Calif. Democrat calls for offshore fracking moratorium *(Wednesday, November 20, 2013)*

Phil Taylor, E&E reporter

California Rep. Lois Capps (D) yesterday called for a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing off the Southern California coast.

Capps aired her concerns during yesterday's floor debate over a pair of oil and gas drilling bills, one of which would prohibit the Bureau of Land Management from regulating hydraulic fracturing onshore.

Capps referenced a recent Associated Press investigation that confirmed companies operating off the California coast have used hydraulic fracturing at least a dozen times over the past decades.

"We know virtually nothing about the size of these fracs, the chemicals being used or the impacts on the marine environment," Capps said. "They have been approved with categorical exemptions and decades-old permits that are woefully inadequate."

While fracking has occurred for decades in the Pacific -- and infrequently in the Gulf of Mexico -- sensitivities over oil and gas pollution are heightened in Southern California, particularly following a 1969 spill off Santa Barbara that released more than 3 million gallons of crude into the ocean.

Capps offered an amendment to H.R. 2728 that would impose a moratorium on offshore fracking until an environmental review can be completed, but it was not ruled in order.

Capps yesterday sent a [letter](#) to Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and U.S. EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy asking for a moratorium on fracking off the coast until a review of its potential impacts on the marine environment is completed.

"There is a great deal we do not yet know about the environmental and public health impacts of fracking onshore, let alone offshore," she wrote. "The techniques, materials and chemicals used in offshore fracking differ in significant ways from those used in onshore fracking, and there are clear differences in the surrounding environment."

She added that the underwater leaks and spills would be harder to detect, and their impacts on marine species remain unclear.

According to the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, which oversees drilling from grandfathered rigs off the California coast, fracking occurs on a smaller scale offshore due to the different geologies and the logistical challenges with offshore platforms.

Offshore fracking uses about 2 percent of the water that fracturing jobs onshore use in places including the Marcellus Shale, it said.

"To the limited extent that it is used offshore, each [fracking] application is unique and receives a thorough examination by trained experts," BSEE said on its website.

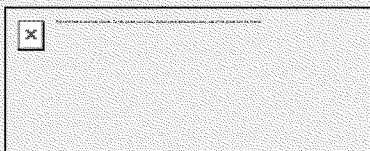
The release of fracking fluids is overseen by EPA under Clean Water Act permits for offshore oil and gas operations. Those permits address the chemical constituents that are allowable for overboard discharge of treated water, BSEE said.

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E&E Publishing, LLC
122 C St., Ste. 722, NW, Wash., D.C. 20001.
Phone: 202-628-6500. Fax: 202-737-5299.
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